

WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?

By RUPERT HUGHES

With Illustrations by James Montgomery Flagg

VI.—In the Temple of Cupid

IF Persis and the others were rejoicing in their emancipation from formalities too familiar, Forbes was glad that he had escaped them for the reverse reason. Hospitality had been dispensed on a lavish scale at his own home in the South before his father's death, but the servants there were negroes, slaves, or descendants of slaves, and he knew just the right mixture of affection and tyranny to administer to them. But where servile white foreigners, with their curious humilities and pomposities, bowed heads and elevated eyebrows, he had not learned just how much to demand and how much to concede.

He was glad that there was no valet to unpack his things, for he was afraid that his secret wardrobe might not pass such experienced inspection. He laid out his own pajamas, brushes, and clean things against the morning.

Ten Eyck, who shared the same bathroom with Forbes, came in to borrow a match for his pipe, noted Forbes' industry, and quoted one of the few classics that he still read—Rabelais: "Panurge had it right when he said, 'I am never so well served as when I am my own valet.' I tell you, Forbes, my millionaires may have our little troubles, but we escape the worst of 'em, eh, John D.?"

"I wish you'd cut out that talk about my being a millionaire," Forbes broke in, impatiently.

"Millionaire is a newspaper term," Ten Eyck explained, "for anybody who is worth more than a few thousand dollars."

"But I'm not worth anything and never shall be," Forbes confessed. "I'm not rich at all. I've nothing but a few hundred dollars and my pica-yune salary."

Ten Eyck took the great denial without emotion. "Then I congratulate you on being one of the poor but honest, instead of the criminal rich."

"I'm poor, but I'm not honest," Forbes said. "I'm obtaining courtesy under false pretenses."

"Rot!" said Ten Eyck. "Money couldn't buy what you're getting, and the lack of it couldn't lose what you've gained. They like you. You belong. That's all there is to it."

"Of course that's all. What does anybody here care how much you've got or haven't got, so long as you're congenial and aren't proposing to marry anybody?"

Forbes lifted his head with a quick, startled movement that did not escape Ten Eyck.

"What I say goes along the line, Forbes. You were good to me when I was sick in Manila. Don't you go and get sick here. Don't fall in love too far, Forbes. I like you mighty well—and naming no names—I like her mighty well, but don't get false notions in your head, and don't put false notions in hers."

"About my money, you mean?" "Umm-humm."

"You think that money would make a difference to her?" "Hah!" Ten Eyck snorted. "Would water make any difference to a fish?"

"But if she loved—"

"My boy, you can keep a mighty sweet canary in a mighty little cage, and it will sing away like mad and be very fond of you; but you can't keep a bird of paradise there—or a sea-gull—can you?"

"I reckon not," said Forbes. "You understand me, don't you, old man?"

"I get you, Steve."

They sat and smoked a long while. Then Ten Eyck yawned, and gripped Forbes' shoulder hard and went out, pausing to look at him sadly.

Forbes sat smoking his cigar till it was gone. Then he made ready for bed, blew out the candle, raised the curtain, and paused to stare blankly into the dark mass of a green hill or a great cloud, whichever it was, piled up against a sky sprinkled over with a powder of little stars. Among them was one planet whose name he did not know. As he watched, it moved with imperceptible stealth out of his sight behind the hill.

He gave up Persis as completely as he gave up the planet. A few days ago he did not know her name. A few days more and she would have slipped from his sky.

The only dream that Forbes knew that night—or remembered, at least—was a dream of his latest garison, and the same bugle humming like the single nagging morning fly that frets a sleeper awake.

He leaped from his bed, and was astonished to find himself standing in a strange room with an open window facing an unknown landscape.

At night he had seen his room in vast shadows clouded about a meek candle. The window had shown him only a blur of gloom against a sky of star-dust.

Now he found himself in a sumptuously furnished chamber, whose window framed a scene of royally ordered beauty—a great lawn as level and almost as spacious as a parade-ground, and bordered with a marble balustrade that seemed to run on forever regardless of expense. Marble statues and bronzes and fountains were here and there. And up a noble hill a stairway, as beautiful as a sea-gull's wings, soared to a park space where a little marble temple sheltered an image which he judged to be Cupid's.

Forbes crept back to bed, but only to reproach himself with sloth. He could not afford to miss a sunrise such as this would be. There would be occasions enough for sleep; but he was going to leave the Enslie Eden this very day forever.

He flung himself from the alien linen and mahogany, and, hastening into the bathroom, stepped into the tub, drew

the circular curtain around him quietly not to awaken his neighbor, Ten Eyck, and turned the little wheels marked "shower" and "needle" and "cold," and received the responding rains. There was no question that they were cold.

But the reaction was a jubilee in every artery, and he dressed with eagerness for whatever the day might bring. He opened his door softly and went down the twilight of the stairway like an escaping thief. The servantless tenants had neglected to bolt and chain the outside door. He swung it back and stepped out.

He glanced with admiring awe at the dew-pebbled lawn, the colonnades, and the cloisters, but hastened to the eastern side to watch the day breaking over the skyline of Westchester.

A imperial group of lilac-trees seemed to hold torches up for the sun to kindle. They blazed with purple flame.

Forbes thought: "Those are the lilacs Enslie loves and owns. This is Enslie's heaven. This is Enslie's sun. And she is Enslie's, too." Then, with all the bravery and optimism the dawn could lavish, he felt: "Well, she belongs here; I don't. She needs these things. I can't get 'em for her. So it's good-by, Persis, and no harm done."

He was sure that Enslie would never know of the kiss he had stolen from Enslie's property. And he was sure that Enslie would never miss a certain lilac cluster whose grace and color especially caught Forbes' fancy. He plucked it. Just as it snapped in his hand, and flung a fragrant dew upon his face he heard another slight sound above. He glanced up.

At an upper window, a few paces from where Forbes stood, Persis leaned out like another blessed damsel looking downward at the sun. She did not see Forbes as her drowsy gaze swept the hills. She was not there, however, to adore the dawn. It had troubled her sleep, and she wanted to shut it out. Her hands were tugging drowsily at one of the blinds, but it was held by a catch in the wall. She must lean far out to release it.

The very homeliness of her motive and the act made her the more appealing to Forbes. A creamy nightcap of lace and bow-knots was all askew on her tousled hair, and a long loop of it slid down into her bosom as she bent far forward. She had not paused even to throw on a shawl, and her nightgown was so vaporous a drapery that it hardly mattered where it clung or lapped.

Forbes blushed for her, but gazed entranced while she fumbled at the lock till it yielded. Then she reached out for the other shutter and stared forth into the sun, stared between her white arms, outstretched like the wings of an angel at a window in the sky.

Now Forbes knew that he loved her irrevocably. He would storm the clouds to win her. He could afford a home with a pair of shutters, and she could close them against the sun and be as snug as a cuckoo in a clock.

He was so resolved upon winning her that he counted her already his, and, with a gesture like throwing up his cap, flung the lilacs he held straight at her. They missed her, but they caught her eye, and she followed them down to where he dared to catch them for another cast.

When he looked up again the blinds were shut. He was alone in the world, his lilacs and his heart barred out and rejected. She had retreated to Enslie's stronghold and shuttered herself in.

Forbes turned away to exile in a world of gloom. He heard a little sound above, and whirled quickly. The shutters were opening again. He saw her eyes. She was frowning fiercely; but that was because of the sharp sun, for her lips were smiling and she was whispering something.

He could not understand her, and she could not hear his whisper. They were afraid to awaken the house with louder talk. So he beckoned to her to come down. She shook her head. He insisted with ardent gesticulation at the beauty of the scene. She shook her head so violently that her cap fell off. She clutched it at it, and her hair fell all about her. He caught the cap as it drifted down like a tired butterfly. He brushed her hair back and pleaded for the cap. He shook his head and tossed her the lilacs. She refused to take them, and put out her hands for the cap. He beckoned her again to come down, and she frowned ferociously. Then, at length, she smiled and nodded and turned away.

He waited, afraid to walk because the gravel crunched alarmingly. He could see the gardener's cottage down the hill, and he was glad that no one was stirring there; not a thread of smoke spun from the chimney.

After he had waited for a tiny eternity he heard her snap her fingers, and looked up to find her fully dressed, all tempt and tiny-faced and precise. She held out beseeching palms for her cap, but he pocketed it and commanded her to descend. She left the window with a look of angry amusement, and he knew that she was yielding to his orders.

It was his first command, and she had obeyed it.

For convincing the human heart there is no argument like a parable or analogy, and there is no more worthless proof to the mind. So long as Persis could be called a bird of paradise, too rich for a canary cage, or a sea-gull, too wild, or a planet unattainable, Forbes admitted that his hopes of winning her and keeping her were foolish. He gave her up. So much for the metaphors. But when he saw her at the window in the daylight, and saw, not a sea-gull nor a planet, but just a pretty, drowsy girl with rumpled hair, he tossed aside all the arguments by parable and analogy, as candle-ends unfit for sunshine. She was only a woman, and he was all of a man, and this was America, and, by George Washington, he would have her to wife!

He would begin the day right with a wholesome morning smack. He tiptoed along the grass around to the door, and met her in the living-room. And as soon as he met her he set his arms about her. But she was almost sullen as she pushed him away.

"By what right?" "Conquest and possession."

"What if somebody should see you with it?" "Nobody shall."

"Somebody always does. Nobody would believe it fell out of a window!" "It fell straight into my heart."

"She gave him up with a shrug. 'Good Lord, you men! I don't suppose there's any coffee? I'm so used to having it in bed before I get up that I'm faint.' 'I could make you some, if I knew where the coffee was, and the coffee-pot, and if there were any fire.' 'Let's look into the kitchen.' 'She knew the way, and led him into a great food-studio—a place to delight a chef with its equipment and art with its copper."

But the range was as cold as its white-glazed chimney. They cast about for fuel, and found that Prout had fetched kindling and coal the afternoon before.

Forbes soon had a fire snapping under one lid, and Persis hunted through

Forbes thought of the bird of paradise and the sea-gull again, and he doubted the value of his cage again. They sauntered across the lawn and up the stairs. He took her arm to help her, but she shook her head.

"Please! Now, tell me all about yourself."

"There's nothing to tell."

"There must be. I've a right to hear it. Think of it, you've kissed me once, and I didn't fight. I let you. Good Lord, I nearly kissed you!" His arms rushed toward her; but she frowned.

"Don't make me go back. I was saying, you've kissed me, and we've had a terrible escapade in a strange kitchen, and I hardly know your first name. So you're a soldier?" He nodded. "West Point?" He nodded. "Did you ever get in a real fight?" He nodded.

"Where?" "Cuba. Philippines."

"You were in the Spanish war? Really! I didn't know you were so old."

"I wasn't so old then. I'm very an-

is from the arrow of this sharp-shooter."

They were standing in the little temple, between them a little marble rascal with a bow and arrow. Persis put her hand to her heart. He mistook the gesture and asked, with sudden zest: "He didn't hit you, too, did he?"

"I was thinking of you," she murmured, staring at him with wet eyes. "Wounded and bleeding, your flesh all torn, and the surgeons gouging in the wounds. Oh!"

She toppled backward and sank on a marble bench before he could help her. He stared at her in bewildered unbelief. He understood that she was nearly as soon because he had suffered once.

"Why, God bless your wonderful sweet soul!" he gasped, and would have knelt and clasped his arms around her. But even in the swimming of his senses her prudence was on guard, and his indiscretion restored her to herself like a dash of water.

"I beg you to be careful," she said.



JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG

Her hands were tugging drowsily at one of the blinds.

She writhed with pain for his sake. "Did it hurt—hideously?"

"Not half so much as the two pellets I got in my side. They probed for them till I made them stop, partly because I wasn't enjoying it and partly because probing kills more than cart-ridges."

"How did they get them out, then?" "They didn't."

She stared at him wild-eyed. "You don't mean to say that you're standing there with a couple of bullets in you? Why, you're positively uncanny."

"I'm sorry, if it disturbs you." "Oh, please! You're wonderful. But aren't you afraid they'll kill you—turn green or something?"

"They're neatly surrounded by now with aseptic sacs, the surgeon tells me. I'd forgotten all about them till you reminded me."

"And they never pain you?" "The only wound I'm suffering now 'you are perfectly visible from the house."

"But nobody's awake. The blinds are closed."

"There are always eyes behind blinds."

"Then let them see me tell you how much I love you."

"Not here," she gasped. "Don't tell me that here."

"Why not?" "Do you really want to know?"

"Mr. Enslie built this little temple to do it. He proposed to me in it. And did he?" Forbes asked, in a voice that rattled. "Did he propose to you?"

"Regularly."

She studied Forbes closely and laughed aloud at the almost nausea he plainly felt.

"I thought that would shock the nonsense out of you," she triumphed. "Now let's be sensible while the sun shines, and get better acquainted. Tell me more about you, and I'll tell you some awful things about me."

She sauntered on in an arch and riant humor. He resented it, and yet he followed her, hating this mood of hers, yet finding her more precious as he found her more difficult.

She quizzed him about his life, his home, his earlier loves. She told him of her life: endowed with every material comfort, yet with a vague unhappiness for something or somebody—perhaps it was for you," she added, but spoke teasingly. She had been to school in France, and traveled round the world; she had been presented at the courts of England and Italy, Germany, and Russia; had visited at castles and chateaux. Her sister was in England. She had married a title and was unhappy; but for the matter of that, so were the wives of most of the starchy Americans she knew, rich and poor.

She never took much enjoyment in adventures, anyway, she said, because her imagination was always busy with the appearance of her acts. She found herself considering: "How will this look? What gossip will that start? She hated herself for the cold, calculating instinct; but she could not rid herself of it.

est, but they'd talk—and well, I'd rather let them talk."

She led the protesting Forbes homeward again, down the long flight of steps. The most he could exact was the promise of another walk together—some time when it could be arranged without attracting attention or detracting from the duties toward the host and his other guests.

"I hope Winifred hasn't seen us," she said. "The kitchen and the nursery are both to the east. We'll take a chance. You go on into the kitchen and help her, and I'll telephone down from my room. Au voir!"

She opened the outer door ever so slightly and cooed through the slit as narrowly as Bernhardt used to when she had murdered Scarpia. Forbes dawdled a few moments, then went into the kitchen.

He found Winifred playing the part of cook with a vengeance. Her hair was disheveled, her sleeves rolled back, and her face smudged from her smudgy fingers. She had assumed a cook's prerogative of wrath. The moment she saw Forbes she began with a savage, "Oh, it's you! And who's been littering up my clean kitchen?"

"I took the liberty of making myself a little coffee," said Forbes.

"There are two cups."

"I made two cups," said Forbes; and she was too busy to notice the evasion.

"Then, since you've had your breakfast, she snapped, "you can help me get something for the rest. You'd better put this on."

Like another Omphale, she fastened a womanish apron on Hercules, and set him to uncleanly tasks, retrieving butter, milk, salt, and eggs.

After a time there was a buzz, and a little hopper fell in a box on the wall. Winifred went to the house telephone and called out:

"Well! Hello, Persie, what you doing awake so early? Insomnia? No. I will not send your breakfast up on a tray! You can come down and get it. My little snoozer man is helping me."

She hung up the ear-piece and turned to Forbes with her broad smile.

A cook has no chance to entertain her gentleman friends. The minute I get a policeman in here somebody rings."

She kept him wretchedly ill at ease by more of the same banter, which he hardly knew how to take. And she seized his arm with a gesture of culinary courtesy just as Persis sauntered in. Forbes was horrified to note a look of anger in Persis' eyes. He should have been flattered. She greeted Winifred, and also Forbes, with a discreet "Good morning!"

"Good get-busy!" Winifred growled. "What can I do?" said Persis, helplessly.

"For one thing, you can rout the other loafers out of bed."

"How?"

"Use the telephone. Tell 'em the house is on fire."

While Forbes fetched and carried at Winifred's beck and call, Persis rang up the various rooms and conveyed Winifred's orders. But her gentle voice carried no conviction, and Winifred took her place at the instrument and howled in her best cook lingo:

"Get up and come down, or I'll quit you cold and leave you to starve. It's scrambled eggs and bacon the mornin', and no goods exchanged."

She went back to the range, only to be called to the telephone again. Mrs. Neff was imploring a brief respite. Water boiling over and scuttering in hot halibutons from the stove brought Winifred back with a screech. She upbraided Persis for a useless scullery maid and threatened Forbes with a skillet. She was enjoying herself tremendously. She ordered Persis to set the table in the breakfast-room, but refused Forbes permission to help her.

But she slipped away a little later, when she went to rummage the ice-room. He found Persis drifting about in a lake of golden sunshine, distributing delicate china and looking like a moving figurine of bisque. There was a pleasant clink of silver as she laid the knives and forks and spoons, and he thought how wonderful she would be in such a little home as he could offer her, how she would grace the quarters at any army post. She smiled on him, and her smile was sunshine. He went at her once more with that rash of desire. She put up her hand to fend him off, and he knocked a cup out of it.

They knelt together to pick up the pieces. He began:

"While I'm down here on my knees, I ask you again—"

She put her hand to her lips in warning, but he seized the hand. She snatched it away and rose to her feet just as Willie Enslie came in.

Forbes, still on his knees, set busily to work picking up the scattered petals of the china. He felt guilty as a caught burglar, but the unsuspecting Willie paused on the threshold to yawn. Willie was always yawning on the threshold of discovery.

"Morning!" "Morning!" was his almost swallowed greeting.

"We just broke one of your cups," said Persis, "while we were setting the table."

"So long as you don't break the table, I suppose I'm to be congratulated. Had a fearful time this morning without my man. Had to fill my own tub, put off buttons in, shave myself—cut a map of Russia on face. Couldn't get tied to save life. Persis, you'll have to help your little Willie with his bib."

So Persis knotted his scarf for him while Forbes grew restive at the sight. Willie was proprietary in his tone, and he clung drowsily to Persis' arm while her hands hovered about his throat. But when the task was done he toddled through the swing-door to see what wreck had been made of the kitchen.

"You see!" said Persis, reproachfully, putting down the silver very slowly. "You nearly got caught."

"But what of it?" Forbes broke out. "I love you. I'm not ashamed of my love or of you. I want you to be my wife."

The boyish manly sincerity of this convinced her and filled her eyes with a morning haze.

"You do? Really?" She moved on to the next place. He followed her. "Of course I do. Will you?" She continued slowly circling the ta-

ble, with side trips to the sideboard, and he followed with a great ado of helping her. The two were making a slower job of it than either would have required alone.

"It's rather fun being proposed to while one is setting the table," Persis murmured. "We're getting terribly domestic already."

"You'd be so beautiful domesticated," Forbes urged.

"But so somebody else thinks—and we're on his grounds." And since it was characteristic of Persis to express a virtue in a sporting term, she shook her head. "We're not playing strictly according to Hoyle. It's not quite cricket."

"I know it," said Forbes. "And I—I dare you to come outside—off the place."

"All right. I will, the first chance I get."

"The first chance you get to what?" said Mrs. Neff, who appeared as suddenly as Cinderella's witch. And she looked a trifle witchy this morning without the rejuvenating spells of her maid. "I couldn't hear overbearing, but my eyes aren't open. I didn't see anything."

Persis surprised Forbes and Mrs. Neff by her frankness.

"I was saying I would take a long walk with Mr. Forbes the first chance I get."

"Good work!" said Mrs. Neff, quite earnestly. "I was telling him, quite a love of a couple you two would make." Persis turned on her in amazement.

"You were telling Mr. Forbes that?" "Yes, I was. When a woman gets as old as I feel of mornings, she has the right to be a matchmaker. You two go on and work out your own salvation and I'll keep Willie off the scent. If I could prevent Alice from marrying Stowe Webb, and you from marrying Willie, I'd retire on my laurels. I dote on conspiracies. That's where Alice gets her knack for plots."

This to her daughter, who sauntered in just in time to receive the facer and gasp.

"Why, mother, what do you mean?" Forbes and Persis paid little heed to the usual duel of these two women. They were thinking of the complexity of outside interference in their own program of quiet communion.

Persis' mind was full of proof for Mrs. Neff, but she was silenced by the presence of Alice, and Ten Eyck's appearance, and the irruption of Winifred with a great tray of egg-gold and bacon-bronze.

It was an informal gathering at that breakfast table. Important articles of toilet had been forgotten, and there were no maids or men to repair the omissions. But too great correctness would have been an anachronism at Winifred's table. Everybody had gone to bed early and tired, and had slept longer and better than usual. Doing without was a new game to these people, and they made a picnic-ground of the breakfast-room.

Even Willie tried to romp with his guests, but he lacked the genius for hilarity, and his jokes consisted principally of repeating exactly what somebody else had just said, then laughing as hard as he could.

He told Persis that he wanted to show her the farm, and the new fountain in the sunken gardens, and he told her in such a way that the others felt themselves cordially invited to go along. But they were used to tactlessness from Willie, and they merely winked mutually.

Mrs. Neff led Forbes about the place, which she knew well. But the beauties were only torments to him. Below the climbing marble stairway to the temple there was a broken stairway winding down the hill. It meandered like the dry bed of a stream, between brick walls, bordered with flowers, with now and then a resting place, or some quaint niche where a little statue smiled or a fountain trilled and tinkled.

At two stages of the descent there were circular levels with ornate shelters and aristocratic plants. From the lowest shelf there was only a path dropping down the long hill to a distant wall; beyond this a ragged woods like a mob of poor shut out from a rich man's place.

"That wall is the end of the Enslie estate," said Mrs. Neff.

"There is an end to it, then?" said Forbes, more bitterly than he intended.

"There's an end to everything, my boy," Mrs. Neff brooded, "with far-off bitterness of her own—an end to wealth and love and everything."

But Forbes was too young in his own anxieties to give much importance to her aged plaints, though she was not too old to understand his. He was glancing upward now and then to the little temple. It was visible from here, though the two figures in it were small and blurred with light.

Forbes was sure that Enslie was proposing to Persis, for he gesticulated, pointed at the landscape and the house. He was evidently commending these to Persis, laying them at her feet, begging her to become at once the chateaine of this splendor.

Forbes wanted to abandon Mrs. Neff and fly to the rescue of Persis.

He could not know that he pleased well enough at a distance. His absence wrought for him against Willie Enslie's presence. Willie was indeed commending his estate to Persis, urging her to marry him at once and settle here for the summer, except what time they might spend abroad at Newport. But while he pleaded Persis was searching Enslie's landscape for Forbes. It would be a joy for Forbes and her to pick out a hundred acres or more—not too far from New York; perhaps among the hunting and poloing colonies on Long Island. While they were building their could cruise.

And so, while Willie pleaded in his nagging way, her own imagination was attorney for Forbes. Only it was imagining a Forbes that did not exist, a fairly rich and decently leisured Forbes. Down below, looking up to her with such eyes as hers in hell cast on their beloveds in heaven, was the real Forbes, poor, hard-worked, with no financial prospects beyond a minute increase of wage by slow promotion. And he had only a few days more of leisure before he resumed the livery of the nation.